Bible Fellowship Teaching Plan for James 5:13-20 (November 15, 2026)
Living Faith in Action: Prayer, Confession, and Restoration

Central Truth: Authentic faith is demonstrated through a life of continual dependence on God in every circumstance and loving concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of others.

Key Passage (15b): "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."

Supporting Scripture: Genesis 1:27, Psalm 86:15, Zephaniah 3:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, Philippians 4:6-7, Matthew 20:29, 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Acts 19:11, 1 Peter 5:2, Titus 1:9, Mark 6:13, Philippians 1:21, 2 Corinthians 5:8, and John 9:2.

Opening Question: When life brings an unexpected hardship, sickness, disappointment, or even great happiness, what's your first response? Do you immediately turn to God in prayer and praise, or do you tend to rely on your own strength and understanding?

Background: In the first half of chapter five, James has called those who are going through trials to patiently persevere, always remembering that the Lord is returning soon. As they wait, they are to avoid complaining against one another, learn from the steadfastness of the prophets and Job, and always speak with honesty and transparency. In the closing eight verses of his letter, James adds three more responsibilities of authentic faith: dependence upon God through prayer; mutual confession, prayer, and spiritual encouragement; and loving efforts to restore those who wander from the truth.

Lesson Objectives:

1) Recognize that prayer and praise should be the natural expressions of faith in every circumstance of life.
2) Understand the role of spiritually mature members in caring for those who are sick or struggling.
3) Recognize that effective prayer depends upon the character and faithfulness of God rather than the ability of the person praying.
4) Understand the privilege and responsibility of believers to lovingly pursue and restore fellow believers who wander from the truth.
5) Apply the practical lessons of James by developing a life characterized by dependence upon God and loving care for others.

I. Genuine Faith Turns to God in Every Circumstance (13)

A. Prayer is the appropriate first response to suffering.

1. James uses a broad term for suffering that includes sickness, grief, disappointment, persecution, financial loss, and other hardships.
2. Difficult circumstances often reveal where our true confidence and hope are placed.
3. Instead of becoming anxious, impatient, defensive, or resentful, believers should turn to God in prayer.
4. Prayer acknowledges that God is the source of our help, strength, wisdom, and comfort.
5. Suffering can become an opportunity to draw closer to God.

B. Praise is the appropriate response to joy.

1. James has told us that every good and perfect gift comes from God.
2. We should not wait until our blessings pass before remembering to praise Him.
3. Praise sanctifies our joy and reminds us that God is the source of every good gift.
4. Singing praise to the Lord is a natural expression of a heart that recognizes God's goodness.

C. Worship connects our beliefs to our behavior.

1. James has consistently emphasized that authentic faith must be demonstrated through our actions.
2. Our emotions should draw us closer to God.
3. Worship helps prevent our circumstances and emotions from becoming the center of our lives.

Discussion Questions:

1) Why do you think our first response to hardship is often anxiety or frustration instead of prayer?
2) How can suffering reveal where our true confidence and hope are placed?
3) What's the difference between simply praying when we are in trouble and developing a lifestyle of continual dependence upon God?
4) Why is it sometimes easier to pray during difficult circumstances than to remember to praise God during good times?
5) How can worship help us maintain a proper perspective when our emotions are especially strong?

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1) When unexpected difficulties arise, what's my first response--Do I turn to God or attempt to handle it myself?
2) Am I as intentional about praising God during good times as I am about asking Him for help during bad times?
3) Is there a particular circumstance in my life that I need to bring more consistently before the Lord?
4) Do my daily attitudes and responses demonstrate that my faith is genuine?

Key Application: Whatever our circumstances, prayer and praise should be the natural expressions of a heart that fully relies on God.

II. Genuine Faith is Seen in Prayer and Mutual Care (14-18)

A. Those who are sick should seek the prayers of spiritually mature believers

1. James instructs the sick person to call the elders of the church.
2. Elders were spiritually mature men who served as undershepherds of Christ, teachers of God's Word, decision-makers, and intercessors.
3. The elders are to pray over the sick and anoint them with oil in the Name of the Lord.
    a. Anointing with oil was a familiar practice in biblical times and may have provided physical comfort and a tangible reminder of God's care.
    b. The power of healing does not reside in the oil or the person applying it. All power belongs to God.
    c. Prayer offered in the name of Jesus means praying in submission to His authority and according to His will.

B. Genuine prayer is always offered in faith, leaving the results to God (15).

1. James tells us that the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and that the Lord will raise him up.
2. This does not mean that every prayer for physical healing will necessarily be answered in the way we desire.
3. Genuine faith trusts God's wisdom, power, and purposes, even when the outcome differs from our expectations.
4. in answer to the prayer of faith, God's healing may come in the form of our final healing as He takes us to heaven.

C. Confession and mutual prayer promote healing and restoration (16).

1. James connects confession, repentance, prayer, and healing.
2. Sometimes--but not always--sickness may be the result of particular sin.
3. When sin is involved, confession, accountability, and genuine repentance are important steps toward spiritual restoration.
4. Confession should be directed appropriately:
    a. To someone we have wronged.

b. To spiritually mature and trustworthy believers when we need prayer, encouragement, and accountability.

5. James is not encouraging indiscriminate public disclosure of every personal sin.
6. Believers should not attempt to carry every burden alone.

D. The prayers of righteous people are powerful and effective (16).

1. The effectiveness of prayer does not depend on a person's education, position, wealth, prominence, or church office.
2. James sets before us the example of Elijah's life to show the power of prayer.
   a. Elijah was not a superhuman spiritual figure, but a man with ordinary human weaknesses and limitations.
   b. His prayers were effective because God was at work through them.
   c. The power is not in the person praying but in the God who hears and answers prayer.

Discussion Questions:

1) Why do you think James instructs the sick person to call the elders?
2) What does the instruction to pray and anoint the sick in the name of the Lord teach us about the source of healing?
3) What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus rather than simply using His name at the end of a prayer?
4) How should we understand James's promise that the prayer of faith will save the sick person when we know that faithful Christians sometimes remain ill or even die?
5) Why is it important to recognize that not all sickness is the result of personal sin?
6) What is the relationship between confession, repentance, forgiveness, and spiritual healing?

7) What encouragement should we receive from James's description of Elijah as a man just like us?

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1) Do I regularly ask others to pray for me when I'm facing difficult circumstances, or do I tend to keep my struggles private?
2) Am I available and willing to pray for others when they are sick, discouraged, or struggling spiritually?
3) Is there an unresolved sin I need to confess to God or to someone I have wronged?
4) Am I willing to be appropriately transparent with a trusted Christian brother or sister when I need encouragement and accountability?
5) Does my prayer life demonstrate the kind of dependence upon God that James describes?

Key Application: God never intends for His children to face suffering, sickness, or the struggle against sin alone. He invites us to depend upon Him and experience His care through the family of believers.

III. Genuine Faith Lovingly Pursues Those Who Wander from the Truth (19-20). James closes his letter by emphasizing the responsibility believers have for the spiritual well-being of one another.

A. Believers can wander from the truth, and wandering from the truth can take many forms:

1. Impure thoughts and attitudes.
2. Wayward or sinful conduct.
3. Drifting away from a faithful relationship with God.

B. Genuine faith never becomes indifferent to the spiritual condition of others. Believers have a responsibility to help restore those who wander.

1. The goal is not to condemn, embarrass, or punish the wandering believer.
2. The goal is spiritual restoration and renewed fellowship with God.
3. This responsibility requires humility, patience, wisdom, prayer, and genuine love.

C. Restoration should reflect heavenly wisdom.

1. Although James doesn't provide a detailed procedure for restoring someone, he has already given us principles for approaching others in being quick to hear and slow to speak (1:19) and employing wisdom that is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere (3:17).
2. We pray for the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit.
3. We model the authentic faith we are encouraging others to practice.

D. Restoring a wandering believer can prevent devastating consequences

1. James says that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.
2. By helping someone return to the truth, we may prevent further sin and its destructive consequences.
3. Restoration protects the individual and strengthens the entire body of Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1) What are some ways a Christian might gradually wander from the truth without immediately recognizing it?
2) Why is it important for believers to remain concerned about the spiritual condition of other Christians?
3) Why is humility so important when approaching someone who has wandered from the truth?
4) How can James 3:17 guide us when we are attempting to help someone return to faithful Christian living?
5) Why might it sometimes be easier to ignore a fellow believer's spiritual struggles rather than become involved?

6) What does James mean when he says that restoring a wandering sinner will cover a multitude of sins?

7) How can a church develop a culture in which believers feel loved, supported, and encouraged to return when they have wandered?

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1) Am I sufficiently concerned about the spiritual well-being of other believers, or have I become indifferent to their struggles?

2) Who in my life who is drifting away from the Lord and needs encouragement, prayer, or loving restoration?

3) Am I willing to become involved in the difficult but important work of helping someone return to the truth?

Key Application: Authentic faith doesn't allow fellow believers to wander away without lovingly pursuing, encouraging, and seeking to restore those who have strayed from the truth.

Summary: James concludes this chapter by showing us three practical expressions of authentic Christian faith.

1. Dependence upon God: In every circumstance, whether suffering or rejoicing, we turn to God through prayer and praise (13).
2. Mutual Care and Accountability: We pray for one another, confess our sins appropriately, and encourage one another toward spiritual and physical restoration (14-18).
3. Loving Restoration: We take responsibility for helping fellow believers who have wandered from the truth return to faithful Christian living.

James closes his letter by bringing together the central message he has emphasized throughout his teaching: genuine faith is a living faith that expresses itself through our dependence upon God and our loving concern for others.

In these final verses, James reminds us that every circumstance of life should draw us toward God. When we suffer, we should pray. When we rejoice, we should sing His praises. When we become sick, we should seek the prayers and support of fellow believers. When we struggle with sin, we should

confess, repent, and seek restoration. And when someone wanders from the truth, we should lovingly seek to bring that person back.

The Christian life was never intended to be lived independently. God invites us to depend upon Him and to experience His sustaining grace through the encouragement, prayers, and loving care of His people.

The example of Elijah reminds us that effective prayer is not reserved for extraordinary spiritual individuals. God works through ordinary people who earnestly trust Him. Likewise, the responsibility to restore wandering believers belongs to all who genuinely care about the spiritual health of the family of God.

James leaves us with a final challenge: authentic faith is not simply about what we believe or what we say. It is about how we live, how we respond to life's circumstances, and how we care for those around us.

Cindi Murphy's closing observation captures the heartbeat of James's message: "The Christian life is one of continual dependence."

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Closing Challenge for the Class

As we conclude our study of James, consider these three questions:

1) Dependence: Am I humbly bringing every circumstance of my life--my suffering, my joys, my fears, and my uncertainties--to the Lord in prayer?

2) Community: Am I allowing other believers to encourage and support me, while also making myself available to pray for and encourage them?

3) Responsibility: Am I truly concerned about those who are wandering from the truth in such a way that I'm willing to lovingly reach out and help restore them?

Final Thought: A living faith is never merely a private possession. It's a life that's consistently dependent upon God and actively expressed through love, prayer, encouragement, and restoration within the family of Christ. The

greatest evidence of authentic faith is not simply that we know the truth or talk about the truth, but that we live it--and help others walk in it.

Sunday School Lesson for November 15, 2026
James 5:13-20

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this third Sunday of November, we're completing our study of the challenging letter of James. Throughout our previous study of the gospel of John, we heard the Lord Jesus call His disciples to follow Him. In his letter, James shows us just how authentic believers truly follow Jesus so that we might become "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Throughout this brief letter, James has shown us the necessity of living a life that displays the authenticity of a living faith so that, in living that life, we would become "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." In today's study from the last eight verses of chapter five, James concludes his message with several practical applications of the faith he's encouraged us to live, particularly in the matter of our prayers, our sin, and our responsibilities to other believers.

You'll recall that James began chapter five with a call to patience on the part of those who were being defrauded and oppressed by ruthless and unscrupulous people who hoarded their possessions and withheld wages from those to whom James is writing. In encouraging them to be patient, he's reminded them that the Lord is returning soon. As they wait, there are several things that should characterize their lives. We mentioned three last week: they shouldn't complain about each other, they should imitate the trusting patience of the prophets--particularly Job--, and their words should be transparent and trustworthy.

Here in the latter half of chapter five, James encourages his readers to apply this practical faith and patient perseverance in three more areas of their Christian life: prayer, confession of sin, and calling wandering believers back to

a right relationship with God, all in the context of the challenges of everyday life.

In the first half of this chapter, James has told us of two things we're not to do, but in the latter half of this chapter, he explains what we are to do as we count it all joy when we "meet trials of various kinds"--verse thirteen: "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise." Let the strong feelings that come from your circumstances in life--whatever they may be--find expression in acts of worship. When we give voice to our emotions in this way, we protect ourselves from the evil that those emotions might otherwise produce, and that James has warned us about. One commentator writes, "In all cases in which the mind is greatly agitated, whether painfully or pleasantly, whether by sorrow, anger, regret, or by joy, pleasure, [or] hope, / the wise thing to do is to take refuge in an act of worship."

Expanding his outreach beyond the oppressed of the earlier part of this chapter, James asks, "Is any of you afflicted?" By sickness, grief, disappointment, persecution, loss of health or property, or by anything else, because the word we have translated as "afflicted," is an extremely broad word that other versions translate as "suffering hardship," or "in trouble."

Most recently, James has told us that, when we go through various trials, particularly the trials brought on by our circumstances in life, we're not to grumble or complain about others. And, in the first chapter, he told us we're not to complain against God, thinking that it's He Who tempts us. When we experience trials or joy, the best thing we can do is worship--in this case here in verse thirteen--turn to the Lord in prayer, recognizing that God is the source of help and strength and wisdom.

In verse 27 of the first chapter of Genesis, we read, "God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him." There are a lot of ideas about what this "image" actually includes, but it certainly includes some of the

characteristics of God, and the fact that, somewhat like God, we are rational, volitional, and spiritual creatures. Somewhat like God, we're also emotional creatures as we read that God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"--Psalm 86, verse fifteen. When the Israelites who had been sent into exile in Babylon would return, the prophet Zephaniah writes of the Lord in chapter three, verse seventeen, "The LORD your God … will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

The advice James is giving us here is that, in every case where our minds are stirred by strong emotions, we should turn to the God Who gave us minds capable of experiencing these emotions. We should stop making ourselves the center of the universe and turn our thoughts away from our thoughts and obsessions of our own flurry and flutter to the One Who alone is the Creator and Sustainer of everything that exists, in Whose loving arms we find rest, whether in times of suffering or in times of joy.

James asks, "Is anyone among you suffering? Is anyone cheerful?" Paul would answer from his first letter to the followers of Christ in Thessalonica, chapter five, verses seventeen and eighteen: "pray without ceasing; give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." This is what Job did. Remember, James reminded us about the steadfastness of Job earlier in this chapter? After he was told of the sudden, tragic deaths of his children, we read that Job cried out to the Lord, concluding his lament with, "Blessed be the name of the LORD."

All of us have gone through some kind of suffering in life--some more than others--even perhaps some of you are going through a difficult time in your life right now. Suffering always has a way of affecting our spiritual life. We prefer comfort, permanence, predictability, and a smooth ride through life. But if our situation changes--if something happens to disrupt the otherwise peaceful flow of our lives, we usually become anxious rather than prayerful, impatient rather than trusting, or defensive instead of humble.

Throughout our study of James, we've seen this pattern over and over again, but James has never been interested in our outward behavior alone. He has consistently led us beneath the surface to examine the condition of our hearts. Difficult situations and circumstances have a way of showing us where we tend to turn in moments of uncertainty to expose where our hope truly lies.

One commentator writes, "It [doesn't matter what form the trial comes in], it is a privilege which all have to go to God in prayer. And it is an inestimable privilege. Health fails, friends die, property is lost, disappointments come upon us, danger threatens, death approaches--and to whom shall we go but to God? He ever lives. He never fails us or disappoints us if we trust in him, and his ear is ever open to our cries. This would be a sad world indeed," he says, "if it were not for the privilege of prayer. The last resource of millions who suffer … would be taken away, if [we] were denied the access to the throne of grace. As it is, there is no one so poor that he may not pray; no one so disconsolate and forsaken that he may not find in God a friend; no one so broken-hearted that he is not able to bind up his spirit. One of the designs of affliction is to lead us to the throne of grace; and it is a happy result of trials if we are led by our trials to seek God in prayer."

Paul reminded the followers of Christ in Philippi of this in chapter four, verses six and seven of his letter to them: "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Remember the old hymn? "Oh, what peace we often forfeit; oh, what needless pain we bear; all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."

If praise is an appropriate prayer for suffering, it's also appropriate as praise for rejoicing. David opens the 34th Psalm with "I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its

boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!"

The one who experiences joy certainly has great reason to bless and praise the Lord. Such a person has enjoyed the benefit of a priceless gift that makes life richer and full of joy. Tragically, we far too often neglect to lift our praise to the Lord during those times of blessedness until they pass, and we're left with only memories of what once was. Yet even then we have ample reason to lift our hearts in praise to the Lord. As one commentator writes, "Prayer steadies without dimming the bright flame of cheerfulness; and just as thanksgiving sweetens sorrow, so supplication sanctifies joy." "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise."

Throughout this letter, James has been calling us to visibly demonstrate the vitality of our faith through the way we live through a consistency between what we say we believe and how we show what we believe. There can be no dividing wall between faith and practice where our feelings of joy and sorrow, of hope and fear, of love and dislike, are finding expression in praise and prayer day by day and moment by moment. Worship is the connection between our talk and our walk--our confession and our profession. Our emotions themselves will draw us closer to God.

The word we have translated here "to sing praise" is the word from which we get our word, "psalm." Originally, it meant simply to touch, especially to make something vibrate by touching, and therefore came to be used of playing on stringed instruments. It later came to mean to sing along with a harp, then, finally, to sing, whether with or without a stringed instrument. So, James sees music as a natural way to expressing our feelings of joy as he encourages those who are cheerful to sing praise.

James then asks the question in verse fourteen: "Is anyone among you sick?" In the previous verse, James spoke about afflictions in general. Now, he addresses the particular case of sickness. Attending to the physically ill

people of that day might not seem important to us in the 21st century, but it was a significant departure from the practices of the day, as we see, for example, in the way that many of those with physical ailments who tried to get to Jesus were treated.

As the Lord Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday, Matthew tells us in chapter twenty, verse 29 of his gospel, "And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!' The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, 'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!'" And, of course, He healed them of their blindness.

Caring for the sick naturally carried into the life of the church, so we have the words of Paul written to the followers of Christ in Thessalonia in his first letter to them in chapter five, verse fourteen: "we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all." In Acts, chapter nineteen, verse eleven, we read that "God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them." It's clear that, from the start, ministering to the physical needs of brothers and sisters in Christ was a mission focus of the early church.

Those who are sick are to call the elders to pray. Without going into an extended discussion about the various offices within the early church, suffice it to say that these elders, or "presbyters"--to use a word very close to the language in which James wrote--were older men in a congregation who served as undershepherds to the Lord Jesus--First Peter, chapter five, verse two--, teachers who held firmly to the Word of God--Titus, chapter one, verse nine--, decision-makers who participated in addressing sin within the church--

Matthew, chapter eighteen; and Acts, chapter fifteen--, and intercessors--here in James, chapter five.

These elders are to pray over the one who is sick, anointing him with oil in the Name of the Lord. There's nothing here that would suggest that these elders would have any miraculous powers to heal, only that, as spiritually mature individuals, they would be the most likely to make themselves available and, as John Calvin writes, "As being those in whom the power and grace of the Holy Spirit more particularly appeared," "because," adds another writer, "when they pray it is not much less than if the whole Church prayed."

And, notice that the sick person is to call these elders. The elders then and servants in the church today can hardly be expected to know where they're needed if they're not told of the need.

These elders were to anoint the sick with oil--traditionally olive oil--, just as the Lord Jesus had instructed the Twelve who were sent out in Mark, chapter six, verse thirteen, and "anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them." Anointing the sick with oil was an accepted, popular custom in that day. We see, for example, the Good Samaritan pouring oil and wine on the wounds of the man who had been left half dead by the robbers who beat him as he made his way to Jericho in Luke, chapter ten. Even on the Sabbath, the Jewish Talmud permitted the sick and injured to be anointed with oil.

You might be wondering what purpose the oil was intended to serve. Was it purely symbolical? and if so, symbolical of what? Was it intended for the refreshment of the sick person, giving relief to parched skin and stiffened limbs? Was it medicinal? If so, what properties made it so? Was it the channel or instrument of a supernatural cure? Was it an aid to the sick person's faith?

Oil was believed to have healing properties, and the application of the oil provided a felt, tangible sensation that gave a perceptible reinforcement of the prayer for healing. As one commentator notes, "It is easier to believe when

visible means are used than when nothing is visible, and it is still easier to believe when the visible means appear to be likely to contribute to the desired effect." We know that James didn't recommend the oil as medicine because he doesn't say that the oil will cure the sick person but--verse fifteen--it's the prayer of faith that will save him. Besides, if the oil produced the cure, why wait for the elders to come? One author writes, "What was to be conveyed by this medium was, therefore, only sometimes recovery or relief, always consolation, revival of confidence and forgiveness of sins, on condition, of course, of faith and repentance."

So, why don't we hear much about anointing the sick with oil today? It's still practiced among the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, but it seems that, among other branches of Christianity, it's been abandoned because the effect of the anointing didn't necessarily follow from the anointing itself, and the miraculous gift of healing and other similar gifts that were given to the apostles seem to be no longer dispensed by the Holy Spirit. Even so, there's nothing wrong with someone who's sick asking the church elders to pray and anoint him or her with oil, always careful to remember that the oil itself is powerless to heal. As Joel Gregory notes, "All power belongs to God; [and] that power is appropriated through believing prayer." The soothing presence of the oil can very often be a physical reminder of the healing power of prayer.

The prayers of the elders and the anointing with oil are to be carried out "In the Name of the Lord." Praying "in the Name of Jesus" is not some magical invocation of the Name, "Jesus," but it's to pray as someone who is "in Christ"--who abides in Christ and His words rest and remain in him or her, to call upon Him not simply by using His given Name, but praying in the power and authority of what that Name embodies because you've placed your faith in Him. So, when we pray in the power and authority of His Name, we're asking that our prayer be answered according to His will, fully dependent on the fullness of Who He is as we subject our wills to His will.

In verse fifteen, James tells us of the results of that prayer: "And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." As the prayer for the sick is offered in the Name of Jesus--in His power and according to His will--it's not a guarantee that this prayer will be answered according to the will of the one who prayed the prayer. So often, God has something far better in mind--so much better than we could ever ask or imagine. We express our earnest desire, and we--in faith--the kind of faith that's demonstrated in acts of loving obedience--we, in this authentic, proven, tested, tried and true faith, leave the results to God--for our ultimate good and His glory.

James tells us that--as we pray in the Name of Jesus, the Lord Himself will raise us up. There is certainly the sense that, as a result of the action of the Lord's power according to His will, the sick person will be restored to health and put on his or feet with renewed vitality, but also it's possible that James had another kind of healing in mind--the ultimate healing of the soul. After all, that's the best and greatest healing we could ever experience. Paul shared his own longing for that ultimate healing when he told the followers of Christ in Philippi in the first chapter and 21st verse: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain;" for he knew--Second Corinthians, chapter five, verse eight: "that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord."

In those cases where the illness of infirmity had been caused by some sin--as, most likely, the man of Matthew, chapter nine--the prayer of faith of the elders would be intended to bring the sick person to repent of his or her sin and recover from his or her waywardness--perhaps to physical recovery, but certainly to a spiritual restoration. We know from several places in scripture that sickness was generally attributed to sin. For example, when the disciples encountered the man who had been blind since birth, they asked him in John, chapter nine, verse two, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

We know today that not all personal misfortune comes as the result of our sin. Sometimes it does, but not always. When it does, and we call the elders to pray for us, James says if such a person has committed sins, "he will be forgiven." This isn't a blanket declaration that such a person's sins are forgiven simply through the intervention of praying elders, but--in context--the assurance that it's the prayer of faith, perhaps inspired by the elders, that brings the forgiveness of sin as the person responds in confession and repentance to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.

Knowing that "the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick," and "if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven," James encourages each one of us to seek that saving and healing forgiveness--verse sixteen: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." This seems primarily directed towards those who are sick since the verse ends with, "[so] that you may be healed." The plain understanding is that such a confession would contribute to a restoration of the sick person's health.

There's no question that, if the Lord reveals to us that the sickness we might be experiencing is the direct result of sin in our lives, we should confess that sin, presumably to those within the church who are known to be judicious and prudent--particularly the spiritually mature elders who have been called in to pray--, or to the brother or sister we've sinned against, if that's revealed to be the cause of the illness.

The healing that would come from such a confession would be made possible either because the admission of sin and the genuineness of the repentance demonstrate the reality of the change of heart and the forsaking of that sin, or that, in confessing sin to others and experiencing the calmness and peace that would result from that public confession, such a person would be encouraged by the loving, encouraging, prayerful response of other believers as they pray for one another. Ideally, both of those results would be enjoyed by the one who genuinely repents.

James is not suggesting, of course, that we should go before the church gathered and publicly divulge all of our sins. We all can probably tell of an instance of public confession that was certainly inappropriate, if not scandalous. Although scripture encourages confession for reconciliation, transparency, and accountability, it should always be voluntary, orderly, redemptive, restorative, and honoring to the Lord. We should certainly confess our sin to those we've sinned against and seek their forgiveness, and, as in our text, there are times when we should confess our sins to trusted, respected individuals in the family of God as we seek help, encouragement, and accountability from those who are more mature. James, however, is silent as to exactly how that's to be applied individually or as a congregation.

By way of application, Cindi Murphy writes, "James paints a beautiful picture of believers bringing every circumstance of life before the Lord. Whether suffering or rejoicing, sick or wandering, he calls God's people to live in continual dependence upon him and in loving care for one another. So why is this kind of community often so difficult to experience? Because," she says, "we naturally try to carry what God intends us to bring to him and to his people."

"Our instinct is often self-sufficiency. We keep our struggles private, hide our sins, convince ourselves we should be able to handle things alone, or quietly drift when life becomes difficult. Even when we know God invites us to pray, we often exhaust our own strength before turning to him. Instead of allowing others to walk alongside us, we isolate ourselves and miss one of God's gracious means of sustaining our faith."

"James reminds us that living faith is not independent faith. God never intended his children to endure suffering, fight sin, or persevere alone. He invites us to continually depend on him through prayer and to experience his care through the body of Christ. As we humble ourselves before him and one another, we discover the strength, encouragement, and restoration he graciously provides."

As we practice this mutual confession and mutual intercession, James wants us to know that "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." The English Standard Version offers an excellent translation of this difficult thought as it highlights the great power that resides in the prayer of a righteous person--power that has the ability within itself to bring about a great effect.

The effectiveness of this prayer doesn't depend on the talent, education, rank, wealth, prominence, or the office of the one who prays, but only on the fact that he or she is a righteous person, and such a person can be found almost anywhere. The capability of this prayer isn't lifeless, indifferent, cold, or stagnant, as if it had no power within itself, but the power that it bears is effective, earnest, sincere, vigorous, energetic, and persevering. It's the word from which we get our word, "energy," and Joel Gregory reads this part of the verse as "the prayer of a righteous man explodes with potency."

This potency of prayer isn't beyond our reach, James tells us, because Elijah possessed it, and he was human just like we are--verse seventeen: "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit."

In James's day, Elijah was held to be the greatest of the prophets. Even though--because of his prayer--the Lord stopped and then started once again the rain from heaven, he was a lot like us. He was a mere mortal, subject to the same weaknesses and failings as all of us are. Sometimes he was bold and courageous as he stood before the prophets of Baal and God responded by sending down fire from heaven. A minute later, he was running in fear from Jezebel, despondent and depressed. In spite of his frailties, his prayer moved the hand of God to affect the weather--stopping the rains for three-and-a-half years, then praying once again for the rain to come. James's point is that powerful prayers aren't limited to those we might think of as "super saints,"

because Elijah was just like us, and the power comes from the prayer, not from the one praying.

As James has shown us what genuine faith looks like and calls each of us to demonstrate the vitality of our faith, he closes his letter by painting a picture of what genuine faith looks like within the life of the church. Throughout his letter, he's been showing us that living faith is revealed by our response to trials, our words, our relationships, our priorities, and our perseverance. Cindi Murphy writes, "Now he brings everything together by showing believers where to turn in every circumstance. Whether facing suffering, joy, weakness, sin, or spiritual wandering, James repeatedly directs God's people toward dependence on the Lord and loving care for one another." "Living faith lovingly pursues brothers and sisters who begin drifting from the truth."

In verse nineteen, James writes, "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Genuine faith never becomes indifferent to the spiritual condition of others but remains active and engaged in building up the body of Christ.

This "wandering from the truth" could occur in many forms, from impure thoughts to wayward conduct, from falling into doctrinal error to falling into sinful practices--anything that's contrary to what "the word of truth" that he spoke about back in verse eighteen of the first chapter teaches and requires of authentic followers of Jesus Christ. This wandering could have been the cause of the sickness of those in verse fifteen, but it certainly extends far beyond that.

It's the responsibility of those who are authentic followers to "bring back" the one who strays--some older versions read, "convert"--not in the sense of converting someone to faith in Christ, but to turn such a person back to the faith and the truth he or she once professed.

The one who participates in bringing back someone who strays, James says, "will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Back in the first chapter, James showed us the progression from unholy desire to death, and here he shows us how authentic followers of Christ can stop that chain of events. This has caused scholars to debate about whether James is talking about saving the soul of a lost person or saving a believer from continuing estrangement from God and the loss of the fullness of life that should be the mainstay of every believer. Both are possible, but, given the context of life in the community of faith, it seems best to take this as restoring a wayward believer.

How, exactly, are we to bring an erring brother or sister back? Well, James doesn't give us any explicit directions but leaves it to us to discern God's will in the matter--which is certainly where we begin, and not our own, selfish opinion. He's already given us part of the answer to that question in his letter. We don't do it through worldly arguments or anger, but, being quick to hear and slow to speak, we put to use the wisdom of chapter three, verse seventeen that is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere."

As we ourselves model a life of authentic faith, employing the power of prayer that he's just told us about, asking for and relying on the help of the Holy Spirit in bringing back wayward brothers and sisters from the error of their ways, we can have the greatest confidence that we are desiring what the Lord would have us desire, and are submitting and uniting our wills to His. This, then, is the work of faith that can restore wayward believers to living a life of authentic faith and their place within the family of God, thereby covering a multitude of sins which might have otherwise been committed.

With this, James leaves us with no formal conclusion, not because his letter was unfinished or the ending lost, but perhaps, as one commentator suggests, he "wishes by means of a sudden close to leave his last words ringing in the hearts of his readers," as if to say, "If all else that I have written [is]

forgotten, at least remember this:" "whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Such is our responsibility to live a life of authentic faith in community with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Cindi Murphy includes these beautiful words as she closes her workbook on James: "James is a deeply practical book. It speaks to our words, relationships, priorities, suffering, prayers, and care for one another. At times, it can feel like every page reveals another area where we need to grow. That is what God's Word does: it shines light into our hearts, revealing the beauty of Christ and the places where he is continuing his gracious work within us."

"James has shown us that living faith perseveres through trials, receives God's Word with humility, cares for those in need, speaks with grace, seeks heavenly wisdom, and patiently waits for the Lord. These are the fruit of a life rooted in Christ."

"Perhaps the greatest lesson James teaches," she says, "is that the Christian life is one of continual dependence. We ask God for wisdom, submit ourselves to him, pray, confess our sins, and trust him to accomplish his purposes in his perfect timing. That dependence is the heartbeat of genuine faith."

"[As we close this study]," she writes, "continue opening your Bible, asking good questions, walking with God's people, and bringing every joy, sorrow, temptation, and burden to the Lord. Most of all, continue looking to Christ. He is our wisdom, our merciful Judge, our faithful Savior, and the Good Shepherd who holds his people fast. He will complete the good work he has begun in you. One day, [our] faith will become sight. Our trials will be over, our struggle against sin will cease, and every longing will find its answer in the presence of our Savior."

In the meantime, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces

steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Thank you again for being part of our study of the letter of James whose objective in writing this letter is so that we would each become "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." This concludes our study of the letter of James, the brother of Jesus, and it's also the last session of Sunday School on the Go. What began under the leadership of Pastor Derrick Gentle on March the 15th, 2020, as a way to reach members of the First Baptist Church of Tallassee during the COVID quarantines, has continued uninterrupted for more than six-and-a-half years. During that time, we've covered more than half of the Bible--34 books in all. Through the dedicated, behind-the-scenes support from Michael Scarborough, whether the lesson was recorded in Tallassee, Texas, or just south of Tijuana, Mexico, where we had gone for Susan's cancer treatments, Michael saw to it that this study was made available every single week, without fail, except, I think, for one when we couldn't get it uploaded onto the Internet. After Michael left, Bobby Dupree jumped in and brought Sunday School on the Go to a whole new level of creativity and professionalism, and, more recently, Jonathan Rethford expanded the availability of these lessons to reach so many more. I am--we are--greatly indebted to them for their technical expertise and faithful commitment to sharing God's Word. But, most of all, I'm grateful to God for giving us the privilege of sharing His Word with a mission field not only here at home, but far beyond the reach of our place of service here on Friendship Road.

So, as always, as it's still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and--as a reminder of how this all started during COVID--wash your hands! God bless you!

The resources for this lesson include James: Christianity in Real Shoe Leather by Joel Gregory; Planting Roots unpublished manuscript, James: Rooted in Christ, by Cindi Murphy; The Epistle of St. James: The Greek Text with Introduction and Comments, by Joseph B. Mayor; Notes on the Bible by

Albert Barnes (1834), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor's Bible, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor's Greek Testament - Nicoll, Text Courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Exposition of the Entire Bible by John Gill (1746-63), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; ICC New Testament commentary on selected books, Text Courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical (John Peter Lange) text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Expositions Of Holy Scripture, Alexander MacLaren, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; and The Pulpit Commentary, Electronic Database, copyright © 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2010 by BibleSoft, inc.